# Accessible and Inclusive **Leadership** Framework

For Universities and Leadership Education Providers

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# Accessible and Inclusive Leadership Framework

## Purpose

This report provides a flexible framework to help universities and other organisations strengthen accessibility and inclusion across their programmes. While this framework focuses on leadership education, many of its principles also apply across wider teaching and professional development contexts.

## Why This Matters

Disabled students and staff continue to face barriers that affect participation, belonging, and progression. National evidence from Disabled Students UK (2024) highlights substantial inequalities across the UK. For example, only 38% of students with physical or sensory needs find their campus accessible, 44% have missed teaching because rooms were inaccessible, and just 21% feel their modules were designed with accessibility in mind. Many also experience barriers to belonging, with 68% reporting that there are no openly disabled role models. These challenges undermine confidence and wellbeing and restrict access to leadership pathways. By building on existing work and further enhancing accessibility, programme providers can help address these barriers and create pathways that reflect their values, ensuring that every learner can thrive.

## Top Priorities for Improvement

1. Co-design leadership programmes with disabled experts and staff.
2. Improve physical, sensory, and digital accessibility across all activities.
3. Ensure teaching, materials, and assessments are accessible by default.
4. Strengthen representation by involving disabled leaders across teaching and events.
5. Provide consistent staff training in inclusive leadership and digital accessibility.
6. Create transparent processes for adjustments, communication and problem-solving.
7. Track progress and publish annual accessibility updates.

## What Success Looks Like

Disabled people can participate in leadership programmes without unnecessary barriers. Staff feel confident delivering accessible teaching, digital and physical environments are reliable, and disabled people see themselves represented within leadership pathways. Ultimately, accessibility becomes a standard expectation, demonstrated in everyday practice and recognised across the sector.

# Table of Contents

# Executive Summary

Disabled people across higher education continue to face significant barriers to participation, belonging, and progression. Evidence from Disabled Students UK highlights that these barriers reflect broader systemic patterns across the sector. In 2024, 48% of disabled students believed inaccessible assessments reduced their grades, 43% said disability-related absences counted against attendance, 24% found it challenging to access campus libraries, and 53% reported that their physical health had suffered due to their degree. These figures illustrate the scale of the challenge and highlight the importance of embedding accessibility at the heart of education.

At the same time, many institutions delivering leadership education are deeply committed to creating inclusive, empowering environments. Staff across the sector are working hard to improve accessibility, and many are seeking more explicit guidance on how to translate that commitment into everyday practice in teaching, programme design, and culture. Therefore, this report is intended to support that work. It recognises the significant progress already made and provides a structured, evidence-informed framework to help leadership programme providers continue to enhance accessibility, ensuring disabled students can participate, progress, and lead with confidence.

The recommendations in this report focus on five interconnected areas:

**1. Accessible Spaces and Environments**

Reliable physical access, accessible toilets, clear signage, hearing support, safe arrival routes, sensory-friendly spaces, and robust emergency procedures form the foundation for all students to participate. When spaces are predictable, accessible, calm, and welcoming, students experience reduced stress and greater independence.

**2. Accessible Teaching, Learning and Leadership Development**

Providing materials in advance, ensuring captioning, offering multiple ways to engage, pacing sessions predictably, and redesigning assessments to remove unnecessary barriers all enable disabled students to demonstrate leadership on equal terms.

**3. Accessible Digital Design and Communication**

Clear, consistent communication, screen-reader-compatible documents, high-contrast slides, alt text, and materials in multiple formats help students prepare effectively and navigate programmes more confidently. Transparent pre-arrival information reduces anxiety and supports autonomy.

## 4. Inclusive Culture and Representation

Disabled Students UK (2024) highlights that many disabled students report low visibility of disabled role models and overall barriers to belonging. Strengthening representation within leadership pathways can play an essential part in addressing these gaps. Representing disabled leaders across teaching, events, and pathways, challenging deficit-based assumptions, and embedding inclusive leadership models all help build a culture in which disabled students feel recognised, valued, and able to see themselves as future leaders.

## 5. Accountability and Continuous Improvement

Embedding accessibility within planning, budgeting, audits, and annual reviews helps ensure progress is sustained and shared across teams. Short, practical action plans and transparent reporting processes encourage community-wide responsibility and create space for innovation and improvement.

Together, these recommendations address known sector inequalities and offer leadership programme providers an opportunity to model the very qualities they seek to develop, such as empathy, inclusivity, collaboration, and empowerment. By continuing to build accessibility into physical spaces, teaching design, digital communication, assessment practices, and leadership culture, programme providers, working within their institutions, can create a learning environment that fully supports disabled students. Then accessibility becomes a natural part of educational excellence rather than an exception or an afterthought.

Most importantly, this approach ensures that disabled students can participate fully, realise their potential and develop as confident, capable, and inclusive leaders.

Many education providers are already addressing these sector-wide issues through their commitment to inclusive, values-driven leadership. This framework builds on that strong foundation and is intended to support programme providers in continuing to strengthen inclusive practice. It is guided by the Social Model of Disability, recognising that barriers, rather than impairments, create exclusion.

# Using This Framework: Minimum Standards and Progressive Practice

This framework is designed to be used flexibly. Organisations may engage with it in its entirety or focus on the sections most relevant to their role, context, or stage of development. Leadership programme providers are encouraged to use this report to reflect on current strengths, identify development priorities, and support continuous improvement aligned with the values they seek to model. Accessibility is most effective when embedded across programmes and practices, with progress built over time rather than through isolated actions.

**An implementation roadmap is provided in Section O (page 61), consolidating the key actions into a single, practical checklist.**

## Minimum Accessibility Standards (Baseline)

The following areas represent minimum expectations that leadership education providers should seek to ensure:

- **Accessible Physical Environments**
  Leadership teaching and activity spaces are step-free where reasonably practicable; lifts and automatic doors are reliable; accessible toilets are usable and appropriately located; and safe evacuation procedures are in place.
  *(See Section A: Audit and Redesign for Improved Access)*

- **Accessible Teaching Delivery**
  Core teaching activities are accessible by default, including live captions for online and hybrid sessions, accessible teaching materials, and flexible participation methods that do not rely on stamina, speed, or constant visibility.
  *(See Section B: Make Accessibility the Default and Section N: Digital Accessibility Standards)*

- **Clear, Reliable Adjustment Processes**
  Disabled students and staff can request reasonable adjustments through transparent, timely, and confidential processes, with clear points of contact and consistent follow-through.
  *(See Section F: Provide Ongoing Practical Support)*

These baseline actions provide a foundation for inclusive, values-led leadership education to develop over time and reflect established expectations across higher education.

## Developing Inclusive Practice

Beyond baseline standards, inclusive leadership education requires intentional development of practice, skills, and culture. These actions strengthen trust, relevance, and participation, but typically require greater coordination and institutional commitment.

Examples include:

- **Co-design and Co-delivery with Disabled Leaders**
  Involving disabled staff, students, and external professionals in programme design, delivery, and review, so lived experience meaningfully shapes leadership education.
  *(See Section C: Co-Design and Co-Deliver with Disabled Leaders)*

- **Building Staff Capability and Confidence**
  Providing ongoing, practical training in accessible teaching, digital accessibility, and inclusive leadership, so accessibility is embedded in everyday practice rather than dependent on individual expertise.
  *(See Section I: Build Staff Capacity)*


## Embedded and Sector-Leading Practice

The strongest leadership programmes move beyond individual adjustments or isolated initiatives and embed accessibility within governance, funding, and long-term planning.

Examples include:

- **Tracking and Publishing Progress**
  Monitoring accessibility outcomes, reporting transparently, and using data and feedback from disabled students and staff to drive improvement.
  *(See Section J: Track and Publish Progress)*

- **Resourcing Disabled-led Leadership and Research**
  Providing dedicated funding, recognition, and sponsorship for disabled-led leadership development and research activity.
  *(See Section H: Fund Disabled-Led Leadership and Research)*

- **Sustaining Accessibility as Standard Practice**
  Building accessibility into annual budgets, programme planning, procurement, and leadership accountability structures, ensuring progress is not dependent on individual staff members.
  *(See Section L: Sustain Inclusion as Continuous Practice)*

# Why Accessibility in Leadership Education Matters

Disabled students continue to face significant and avoidable barriers across higher education. These challenges shape everyday experience, academic outcomes, opportunities for progression, and students' ability to participate fully. The following findings from the 2024 Disabled Students UK and the Office for Students (OfS) highlight why inclusive education is essential:

- Students with disabilities report significantly fewer positive higher education experiences than their non-disabled peers.

- Only 38% of students with physical or sensory needs find the physical/sensory campus environment accessible.

- 44% report being unable to attend in-person teaching or supervision because the location was inaccessible to them.

- Over one in five (22%) students with physical/sensory needs do not feel confident they could safely exit all buildings they use in an emergency.

- 53% of disabled in-person students have physical or sensory access needs such as quiet environments, hearing loops, clear signage, ergonomic equipment, lifts, or urgent toilet access.

- 31% state that accessible toilets are insufficient, poorly located, or poorly maintained.

- Only 21% feel their modules have been designed with accessibility in mind.

- 43% say a staff member has treated their agreed disability support as merely a suggestion, rather than a requirement.

- Almost one in five disabled students have left, interrupted, switched degrees, or moved to part-time because of inaccessibility or lack of disability support.

- Only 35% feel that staff outside Disability Services understand ableism and how to avoid it.

- A quarter (25%) report feeling unwelcome by staff due to their disability.

- Only 37% believe their educators know how to make teaching and materials accessible.

- Disabled Students UK highlight that disabled students are less likely to feel part of a community, with key barriers to belonging being a lack of representation within their programme and inaccessible extracurricular activities.

- 68% report having no openly disabled academics or role models at their institution to look up to.

- Around 66% of disabled students have more than one impairment, reinforcing that "one size fits all" approaches do not work, and tailored support is essential.

- Since the 2016/17 DSA reforms, higher education providers have been responsible for the additional cost of accessible accommodation. However, in 2024, 46% of disabled students who needed accessible housing reported paying more than non-disabled students, despite guidance stating they should not be charged extra.

- 37% of disabled students have considered leaving their institution, and 38% have considered interrupting their studies.

- 75% report not knowing who, within their institution's leadership, is ultimately responsible for accessibility.

- 48% say inaccessible assessments negatively impacted their academic performance.

- 43% report that disability-related absences were counted against their attendance, discouraging them from managing their health safely.

- 24% found it difficult to access physical library services, highlighting systemic barriers across campus infrastructure.

- Almost a quarter of disabled students (24%) have been in a situation where the only adjustment the institution offered to resolve an access barrier was isolating, dangerous, or humiliating.

Existing progress made across the sector provides a strong foundation for the recommendations in this framework, enabling providers not only to meet national expectations but also to model exemplary inclusive practice in leadership education.

# A. Audit and Redesign for Improved Access

Inclusion starts with creating environments that everyone can easily access, navigate, and use confidently. Physical spaces subtly communicate who is expected, welcomed, and supported. By reviewing and enhancing teaching spaces, facilities, and digital resources as needed, leadership programmes can strengthen the foundations for equitable participation, enabling all staff and students to engage fully without additional effort or stress.

## Actions

**1. Conduct a complete accessibility walk-through of all leadership teaching spaces, offices, and common areas.**

- Review physical access across buildings, venues, or campuses, including step-free routes, automatic doors, and ensure there are spacious lifts suitable for powered wheelchairs and scooters. Where possible, lifts could include audible floor indicators and tactile or braille controls.

- Check that corridors are at least 1.2 m wide, with wider routes where feasible to support larger mobility aids.

- Where possible, use lever-style door handles positioned at accessible heights.

- For rooms (especially teaching spaces) with heavy doors that may be closed at times, wherever possible, install a bell or intercom at wheelchair height.

- Provide clear, high-contrast signage in large sans serif fonts at 1.2–1.6 m height.

- Where possible, include tactile or braille signage to support visually impaired users.

- Check that hearing loops and microphones are available, functional, and that staff feel confident using them. Confirm participants can clearly hear the speaker at the start of sessions, and that background noise is reduced.

- Where feasible, improve acoustics by reducing echo through soft furnishings or sound-absorbing panels.

- Make sure lighting is even, glare-free, and adjustable. Avoiding flickering or harsh fluorescent lighting can help reduce sensory discomfort, migraines, or seizures. Report faulty lighting quickly.

- If possible, offer calm or low-stimulation breakout areas for rest, sensory regulation, or fatigue management.

- Avoid wearing scented products, using diffusers, air fresheners, or strong-smelling cleaning products. Encouraging a scent-free environment benefits many people, including those with sensory sensitivities, migraines, asthma, or fragrance-related illnesses. Environmental health research indicates that around one in three people experience fragrance-related health effects.

- Offer varied seating options, including chairs with arms and tables with sufficient clearance for wheelchair users.

- Choose non-slip, non-reflective flooring that avoids visually confusing patterns.

- Develop tailored emergency protocols for disabled students and staff, including clear evacuation plans, designated safe zones, and communication methods that account for sensory, auditory, and mobility needs. Conduct termly evacuation drills and explicitly include disabled participants wherever safe and appropriate.

- Keep a simple record of what is working well and what could be improved to support ongoing monitoring.

**2. Review accessible toilets to ensure they are genuinely usable for all disabled users.**

- Locate accessible facilities close to teaching or training spaces and signpost them clearly, including tactile or Braille signage where possible.

- Keep spaces uncluttered. Avoid bins or equipment that reduces wheelchair manoeuvring space.

- Provide adequate turning space. While the minimum is 1.5m, ideally provide at least 1.8m to ensure larger wheelchairs can also use the facility (some powered wheelchairs need considerably more turning space than manual wheelchairs).

- Ensure at least one bin has an open top or push-lid that is usable one-handed.

- Position dryers or paper towels near the sink to avoid wheelchair users needing to travel with wet hands. Offering both can help address noise sensitivities.

- Where baby-changing units exist, ensure they fold away and add a polite reminder to secure them after use.

- Emergency pull cords should reach the floor and remain completely unobstructed.

- Consider providing free sanitary products at reachable heights.

- Include a full-length mirror that wheelchair and stoma users can use comfortably.

- Use lever or sensor taps, grab rails and lower-height hooks for coats or bags.

- Add a shelf for equipment such as feeding pumps, stoma supplies, or catheters.

- Keep lighting even and avoid scented products or air fresheners.

- Where multiple toilets exist, if possible, offer both left-hand and right-hand transfer layouts and label them clearly.

### 3. Review transport and arrival routes.

- Provide accessible parking close to entrances with correctly sized Blue Badge bays and step-free paths.

- Ensure dropped kerbs are low enough and not vulnerable to cars blocking them.

- Check that tactile paving is correctly installed and stable.

- Confirm ramps have gentle gradients, grip surfaces and handrails where needed.

- It may be helpful to assess local public transport for wheelchair access and consult with councils where stops lack shelters, seating, or step-free access.

- Provide clear route maps showing accessible entrances and travel options.

- Review lighting and signage along approach routes, supporting those arriving in low light or with visual impairments.

### 4. Audit online and printed materials.

- Ensure websites, forms and course pages work with screen readers and allow keyboard navigation.

- Add alt text to all images, graphs, and charts. Structure documents with correct heading levels.

- Use high-contrast colours and clear sans serif fonts (Arial, Calibri, Verdana).

- Provide materials in multiple formats, e.g. Word, accessible PDF, audio, and large print if required.

- Include contact details for an Access Support Lead or equivalent on all course or event pages.

**5. Engage with disabled staff and students.**

- Invite disabled colleagues and students to share what works well and where barriers remain across physical, digital, sensory, and procedural aspects.

- Involving disabled people early in shaping solutions can strengthen outcomes and build trust.

**6. Ensure library access.**

- Review relevant library access, as 24% of disabled students report difficulty accessing physical library facilities.

**7. Develop a short Accessibility Action Plan.**

- List barriers, actions, responsible persons, and timelines in a shared document.

- Review progress every six months.

- Sharing an annual update may help maintain visibility and accountability.

**8. Budget for accessibility as standard.**

- For Continuing Professional Development participants, for events or external delegates, include accessibility-related costs in budgets.

- Use built-in captions for everyday sessions and use professional captioning where accuracy is essential.

- For students, note-taking support, interpreters, extra travel costs, and specialist equipment are typically funded through Disabled Students Allowance (DSA).

- For staff, Access to Work may fund adjustments. However, interim measures should still be provided while applications are processed.

- Sensory access measures should also be costed into budgets, including quiet rooms, adjustable lighting, scent-free spaces, and accessible communication options.

# B. Make Accessibility the Default

Once physical environments are accessible, the next priority is to enable disabled students to participate fully in teaching, learning, and programme activities. While individual adjustments are vital, designing accessibility into the core of teaching reduces additional workload, builds trust, and ensures that leadership learning reflects inclusive values in practice.

## Actions

**1. Use inclusive teaching practices in leadership programmes.**

Programmes across the sector can sometimes place more emphasis on extroversion, pace, stamina, or constant visibility. Noticing this helps ensure disabled students can participate comfortably and that a broader range of leadership strengths is recognised.

Where feasible:

- Design activities so students can participate and contribute in different ways and offer genuine choice over how they take part (e.g. spoken discussion, written input, visual formats, small-group work, or reflective tasks).

- Acknowledge that traditional expectations (e.g. rapid verbal processing, high stamina, confidence in public speaking) can create unintentional barriers.

- Highlight a broad range of leadership strengths.

- Avoid activities that depend on speed, constant physical stamina, or compulsory on-camera participation.

**2. Provide materials in multiple accessible formats.**

Sharing materials in advance supports students with visual impairments, neurodivergence, fluctuating conditions or processing differences. Making materials accessible before, during and after teaching promotes independence.

It may help to:

- Share slides, readings or notes ahead of time where needed for access.

- Provide all materials and transcripts promptly after sessions in accessible formats (Word, accessible PDF). Offer Word versions alongside PDFs where tagging is difficult.

- Provide large-print copies on request.

- Add alt text to all images, charts, and diagrams.

- Ensure strong colour contrast is used and uncluttered layouts.

- Avoid visually overwhelming content or dense slides.

- Use plain fonts (Arial, Calibri, Verdana, a minimum 12 pt in documents, 28–32 pt on slides).

- Caption all live sessions using built-in tools (Zoom, Teams, Google Meet).

- Share questions with guest speakers in advance to support inclusive preparation.

## 3. Offer different ways to join and participate.

Flexible participation supports students who manage fatigue, pain, access barriers, or anxiety. Hybrid learning benefits many students, not only disabled learners.

Where appropriate:

- Provide hybrid delivery options.

- Allow camera-off participation and alternative modes of engagement.

- Check microphones, hearing loops, and captions before each session.

- Reassure participants that written or chat-based contributions are equally valid.

- Maintain even lighting and minimise background noise; avoid flickering lights.

- Position microphones away from loud ventilation or equipment.

## 4. Manage workload, pacing and predictability.

A predictable structure supports students with executive functioning difficulties, fluctuating conditions, or high cognitive load. Leadership programmes can be intensive, so pacing benefits everyone.

Where possible:

- Share schedules early, including dates for assessments, guest speakers, or intensive sessions.

- Build regular breaks into sessions and allow students to step out and rejoin as needed.

- Avoid extended teaching blocks without rest periods.

- Distribute demanding tasks over multiple sessions rather than concentrating them into one.

- Provide slides, readings and guiding questions in advance.

## 5. Ensure physical accessibility during teaching.

- Make sure there is step-free entry to teaching spaces, with clear signage at eye level.

- Keep accessible toilets easy to locate, clearly signed and uncluttered.

- Avoid scented products or strong-smelling cleaning agents.

- Offer seating options, such as front seating for students who lip-read or are visually impaired, but always let the student choose where they sit.

- Provide a quiet or low-stimulation area for sensory breaks and keep background noise to a minimum in teaching spaces.

- Arrange room layouts so mobility-aid users can move freely.

## 6. Provide practical arrival information.

Providing clear arrival information in advance helps reduce uncertainty and builds confidence and independence.

You may wish to:

- Include transport and parking information (including how many accessible parking bays there are) in all invitations and event pages.

- Describe distances from bus stops, step-free routes and provide contact details for support.

- Consult with local councils where stops lack shelters, seating, or step-free access.

- List nearby accessible facilities such as Changing Places toilets, quiet wheelchair accessible cafés, or breakout spaces.

- Provide clear visual or tactile signage on arrival.

**7. Test accessibility before releasing materials or sessions.**

- Invite disabled students or staff to evaluate online platforms, materials, and rooms.

- Address issues promptly and re-check adjustments.

**8. Provide clear access contact points.**

- Include a named Access Support Lead or equivalent role on all course or event pages.

- Ensure contact details are found easily, and responses are ideally received within 48 hours.

**9. Ensure assessments are accessible.**

Assessments remain one of the most significant barriers for disabled students. The Abrahart judgments (2022, 2024) highlighted higher education providers' legal duties to adjust examinations. However, in 2024, 48% of disabled students believed inaccessible assessments directly lowered their grades.

Where possible, offer:

- A range of assessment formats so students can demonstrate leadership without unnecessary barriers, including:

  - portfolios or reflective journals

  - recorded presentations completed at the student's own pace

  - written commentaries or short essays

  - case studies

  - group assessments with flexible roles

- Provide extended time, breaks or reduced sensory/cognitive load where required.

- Share marking criteria clearly and early in the course.

**10. Record disability-related absences appropriately.**

In UK higher education contexts, the Equality Act 2010 and the EHRC Technical Guidance for Further and Higher Education (2014) state that disability-related absences should be considered separately. Despite this, based on the DSUK 2024 Access Insights

Report, 43% of disabled students report that disability-related absences count towards attendance requirements.

However, being recorded as having a "disability-related absence" does not mean a student is marked as present. It simply ensures they are not penalised, disciplined, or withdrawn solely because of disability-related health needs. In line with the Equality Act and OfS expectations, students must still meet all learning outcomes, complete assessments, demonstrate competency and catch up on missed work. Where practical teaching components cannot be completed due to absence, these may need to be repeated to meet essential requirements.

If possible:

- Ensure programme attendance policies distinguish disability-related absences, so students are not unfairly disadvantaged, while still maintaining essential learning outcomes.

How Accessibility Affects Student Experience (DSUK 2024)
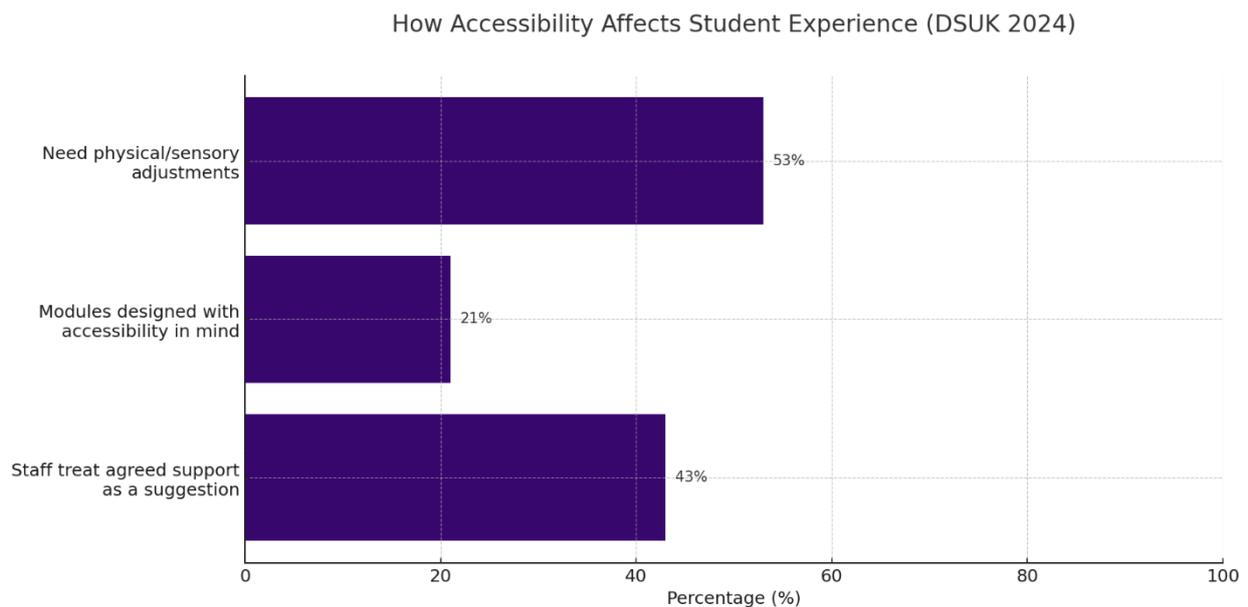
# C. Co-Design and Co-Deliver with Disabled Leaders

Inclusive leadership programmes are enhanced when they are designed with disabled leaders, staff, students, and external professionals. Working in genuine partnership strengthens curriculum relevance, enhances authenticity, and ensures that learning is informed by lived experience. Disabled leaders bring insight into structural barriers, intersectional experiences, and inclusive approaches that enrich learning for everyone involved.

Embedding disabled voices throughout programme design, not only at the feedback stage, helps create education that is more responsive, innovative, and equitable. It supports a collaborative approach in which lived experience shapes both the programme's direction and delivery.

## Actions

**1. Involve disabled professionals early in design.**

- Consider bringing disabled staff and external professionals into planning meetings and module development from the outset, not solely as end-stage reviewers.

- Recognise that lived experience brings valuable insight that can strengthen programme design.

- Offer flexible forms of recognition, such as payment or vouchers, to ensure contributors can participate equitably, including those with restrictions on the types of income they can receive.

**2. Ensure authentic and intersectional representation.**

- Include case studies, readings and examples written by marginalised leaders, not only about them.

- Represent a diversity of disability, race, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic backgrounds across materials.

- Review images, videos, and examples to ensure they are positive, accurate, and empowering.

- Recognise that disabled students have diverse backgrounds and identities, and that their experiences can differ across communities. Disabled students who are also from racially minoritised, LGBTQ+, or low-income backgrounds often experience compounded barriers.

- Ensure representation includes both visible and non-visible impairments across multiple identities.

**3. Conduct a language review before publication.**

- Invite an external disabled professional to review module outlines, learning materials and documentation for inclusive, empowering language before publication.

- Avoid deficit-based or medicalised language such as "suffers from" or "wheelchair-bound."

- Use identity-affirming terminology, following the preferred UK usage of "disabled people" (reflecting the Social Model of Disability), unless individuals request otherwise.

- Where relevant, highlight the difference between UK-preferred terminology and the US variant ("people with disabilities"), supporting students to understand global contexts.

**4. Create opportunities for disabled-led teaching and research.**

- Consider inviting disabled academics, leaders, alumni, or experts to contribute through guest lectures, co-teaching opportunities, workshops or by facilitating group discussions.

- Support and highlight research that is led or co-led by disabled scholars within leadership education and related fields, not only research that focuses on disability.

- Ensure funding, authorship and recognition reflect disabled people's contributions fairly.

- Encourage collaborative authorship between academic staff and disabled professionals to embed lived expertise into published outputs.

**5. Strengthen feedback and improvement mechanisms.**

- Gather anonymous feedback from disabled students and staff on the inclusivity of the programme, co-design processes, and overall experience.

- Consider sharing "You said, we did" updates through newsletters or on-campus posters to show how feedback has led to meaningful, visible improvements.

**6. Conduct a practical representation check.**

- Ask: Can a disabled person see themselves in this course?

- Review whether materials, examples, and narratives reflect disabled leadership positively and accurately.

- Ensure digital and physical environments are accessible, welcoming and affirming of disability.

- Reflect whether disabled participants would recognise themselves as valued future leaders within the programme, and where helpful, seek feedback from disabled students or an external professional to identify opportunities for improvement.

How Disabled Students Rate Staff Understanding of Accessibility and Ableism (DSUK 2024)
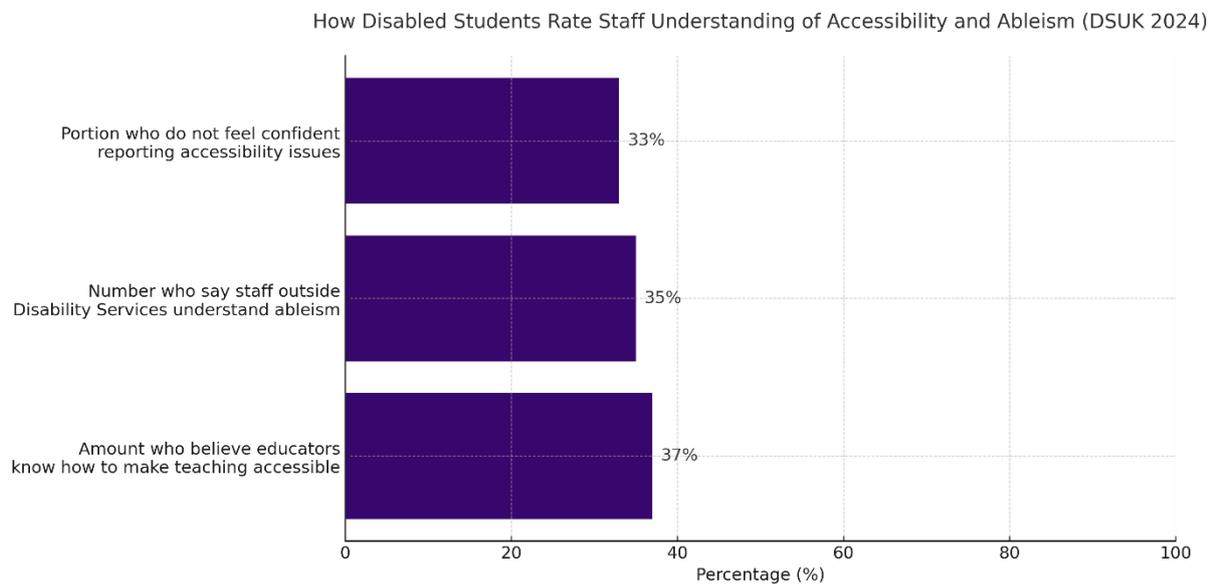
# D. Redesign Recruitment and Participation Pathways (Students)

Recruitment and participation pathways should clearly signal that disabled students are welcomed, valued, and supported throughout their engagement with leadership programmes. Inclusive recruitment is not simply about offering adjustments. It requires transparent communication, accessible processes, and flexible ways for applicants to demonstrate their strengths. Redesigning these pathways ensures that disabled students can make informed choices, participate fully, and feel confident that the programme is designed to support them effectively.

## Actions

**1. Use welcoming, inclusive language in all communications.**

- Clearly state that reasonable adjustments are available and proactively invite applicants to share any access needs.

- Highlight the leadership programme provider's commitment to accessibility and inclusion in course materials, prospectuses, and online information.

- Encourage early conversations about access by framing them as supportive, standard practice rather than exceptional requests.

**2. Be transparent about access from the outset.**

- Provide details of physical access, transport routes, sensory considerations, and available support in all programme information.

- Include a named contact person for applicants to discuss adjustments before applying.

- Offer virtual tours or photographs of teaching and event spaces to support independent assessment of accessibility.

- Ensure access information is consistent across departments and webpages, so applicants do not need to request basic access details repeatedly.

**3. Ensure admissions criteria do not exclude disabled applicants.**

- Review selection criteria for assumptions about stamina, speed, continuous presence, or physical ability that are not essential for success.

- Avoid descriptors that unintentionally favour only extroverted or neurotypical leadership styles and use language that recognises a wide range of strengths.

- Make sure the selection criteria focus on genuine skills and competencies, rather than physical or social expectations that may not be essential.

## 4. Make the application process accessible.

- Ensure online application forms are screen-reader compatible and can be navigated using a keyboard.

- Where appropriate, allow supporting statements to be submitted in accessible formats (e.g. Word, audio or dictated text) while maintaining the same academic expectations for content and quality.

- Provide predictable timelines and clear instructions to reduce cognitive load.

- Avoid time-limited tasks during the application process (e.g. timed written exercises) unless they measure a skill that is genuinely required for success on the programme.

## 5. Train all staff involved in shortlisting or interviewing.

- Provide short, accessible training (e.g. a 30-minute briefing or video module) on unconscious bias, disability confidence, and inclusive communication.

- Provide a simple one-page guide outlining the reasonable adjustments that can be offered during interviews or any tasks in the selection process, so staff know what support is available if an applicant requests it.

- Reinforce that under the Equality Act 2010, disability disclosure must never disadvantage an applicant.

## 6. Offer flexible, accessible interviews.

- Provide both in-person and online interview options wherever possible.

- Offer extended time, rest breaks, and accessible materials in advance.

- Ensure interview environments are scent-free, have step-free access, nearby accessible toilets, hearing loops, and low-stimulation waiting areas.

- If group activities are used, provide clear written instructions, accessible materials and ensure tasks do not rely on speed, uninterrupted stamina, or physical ability.

- Offer interview question areas or themes in advance on request, helping applicants who benefit from extra processing time to engage fully and confidently.

**7. Make extracurricular and leadership opportunities accessible.**

Disabled students can face barriers to activities outside formal teaching, even though these experiences often strengthen confidence, a sense of belonging, and leadership skills. To support equal access:

- Make sure societies, workshops, events, and networking opportunities are accessible, physically, digitally, and financially.

- Provide hybrid or online options for key events where possible.

- Avoid attendance expectations that do not account for fluctuating conditions and offer flexible ways to take part.

- Offer alternative ways to engage in activities such as competitions, projects, or networking events. For networking, this might include small-group discussions, online sessions, written or audio introductions, or structured interest-based matching, so students can participate in ways that suit their needs and energy levels.

**8. Address the financial barriers that disproportionately affect disabled students.**

Disabled students may face additional costs linked to access, participation, and travel. While some of these are funded through Disabled Students Allowance (DSA), leadership programme providers can still play an essential role in ensuring support is timely, transparent, and easy to navigate.

If possible:

- Provide clear guidance and practical support with DSA applications, so students can access the funding they are entitled to.

- Offer interim support where essential adjustments are needed before DSA is approved (e.g. loan equipment, temporary software licences, short-term note-taking support).

- Signpost bursaries or hardship funding where students face additional, disability-related costs not covered by DSA.

**9. Strengthen widening participation support for disabled students.**

Disabled students are often overlooked in widening participation work, despite facing significant structural barriers. Where possible:

- Ensure leadership programme widening participation activities explicitly include disabled students.

- Provide early information on adjustments, funding, and access, so students can make informed choices before applying.

- Involve disabled ambassadors or alumni in outreach activities to build representation and confidence.

**10. Recognise and reward inclusive recruitment practice.**

- Embed inclusive recruitment behaviours within leadership programme team roles, staff appraisals and performance frameworks.

- Celebrate examples of good practice in newsletters and internal communications.

- Share successful case studies to build confidence and capacity across departments.

**11. Ensure placements and practical learning opportunities are accessible.**

- Guide placement providers on reasonable adjustments and inclusive practice.

- Discuss access needs with students before placements begin.

- Where appropriate, offer remote or hybrid placement options where travel or attendance is a barrier.

- Provide an equivalent alternative practical learning experience for students who cannot undertake a physical placement.

# E. Recruit, Support and Retain Disabled Staff

Creating a genuinely inclusive leadership culture means not only supporting disabled students but also ensuring that disabled staff involved in teaching, delivery, and programmes can join, thrive, and progress. Representation matters. When disabled academics and professional staff are visible in pathways, it strengthens the overall culture and demonstrates to students that leadership is possible for people with diverse experiences.

Disabled staff often encounter barriers at various stages of employment, including unclear adjustment pathways, limited progression opportunities, and inconsistent managerial support. Strengthening these areas benefits disabled colleagues, improves staff experience, aligns with the Equality Act 2010, and demonstrates a genuine commitment to inclusion.

## Actions

**1. Make job adverts inclusive, accessible, and welcoming.**

- Use clear, inclusive language that signals the institution and programme team actively welcomes disabled applicants.

- Avoid unnecessary physical, stamina-related, or speed-based requirements (e.g. 'must travel frequently,' 'must stand for long periods') unless they are essential to the role. Focus on the core skills and responsibilities genuinely required for the role.

- Clearly state that reasonable adjustments are available at every stage of the recruitment process.

- Provide job adverts in accessible formats such as Word or accessible PDF and offer large-print versions on request.

- Share information on workplace adjustments, hybrid working options and flexible hours.

**2. Ensure role descriptions support disabled applicants.**

- Review job descriptions and person specifications for criteria that may unintentionally exclude disabled candidates.

- Replace vague behavioural terms (e.g. "energetic," "dynamic") with clear descriptions of the actual skills or responsibilities required. For example, instead

of "Able to cope with pressure," you might specify "Able to manage key deadlines with the appropriate support and adjustments in place."

- Avoid suggesting that high stamina or continuous on-site presence are essential unless required for the role. If elements of the role can be performed flexibly or in a hybrid format, please note this in the advert.

- Show that education teams welcome different leadership strengths and experiences, so applicants feel confident they can succeed in the role.

**3. Make the application process fully accessible.**

- Ensure the online application system is compatible with screen readers, navigable via keyboard, and stable for assistive technologies.

- Provide application materials in accessible formats (e.g. Word documents).

- Allow candidates to outline any adjustment needs in a clear section of the application form (e.g. space to note whether they require alternative interview formats, extra time, or accessibility support).

- Provide predictable timelines and clear communication to reduce cognitive load and uncertainty.

**4. Offer accessible, flexible interview and assessment processes.**

- Provide interview questions in advance upon request to create equitable preparation conditions.

- Offer both online and in-person interview options wherever possible.

- Provide extended time, breaks and accessible versions of all documents and materials.

- Ensure interview spaces are step-free, near accessible toilets, scent-free, and suitable for candidates using hearing aids or assistive listening devices.

- Avoid assessments that rely on speed, memory recall under pressure or unnecessary physical activity.

- Provide alternatives to group assessments where these would disadvantage disabled candidates.

- Allow candidates to demonstrate competency through a range of formats (e.g. written, spoken, pre-recorded or portfolio-based).

**5. Create a supportive culture for disability disclosure.**

- Communicate clearly that disability disclosure will never disadvantage applicants.

- Train managers and panel chairs to respond positively and confidently to disclosure.

- Provide confidential spaces for discussing adjustments with HR or an Access Lead.

- Encourage candidates to discuss any adjustment needs early in the process, while reassuring them that the leadership programme teams and HR will handle disclosures sensitively at any stage. However, early conversations help ensure the proper support is in place.

**6. Ensure accessible onboarding and induction.**

- Provide induction materials in accessible formats from day one.

- Offer a structured conversation about workplace adjustments during the first week.

- Put immediate interim adjustments in place while Access to Work applications are processed.

- Assign a workplace buddy or mentor experienced in inclusion and accessibility.

- Ensure digital systems, software and internal platforms are fully accessible at the point of onboarding.

**7. Provide effective workplace adjustments.**

- Make the adjustments process simple, transparent, and timely.

- Publicise how to request adjustments, who approves them and expected timelines.

- Ensure Access to Work applications are proactively supported by HR and managers.

- Encourage flexible working practices where possible, including hybrid options, balanced workload distribution, and protected time in the diary for focused work without interruptions.

- Review adjustments regularly, recognising that needs may fluctuate over time.

**8. Support disabled staff in progression and leadership pathways.**

- Support disabled staff to have equitable access to development, mentoring and training opportunities.

- Review promotion criteria to remove unnecessary expectations related to stamina, uninterrupted presence, or extensive travel.

- Provide coaching that values diverse leadership styles.

- Identify and address barriers that may prevent disabled researchers from taking part in activities that are traditionally expected in academic careers, such as conference travel, residential training, or in-person networking.

- Encourage sponsored leadership pathways that connect disabled staff with senior mentors.


**9. Train managers and leaders in inclusive leadership.**

- Provide training for managers and leaders involved in leadership education and programme delivery on disability confidence, reasonable adjustments and how to manage performance fairly and supportively.

- Ensure leaders understand fluctuating conditions, non-visible disabilities, and the importance of flexibility.

- Encourage senior leaders to demonstrate inclusive practice in their everyday work, such as clear communication, flexibility where appropriate, and respectful team interactions.


**10. Strengthen retention, wellbeing and belonging.**

- Within teams and leadership-related roles, monitor disability-related staff turnover to identify patterns and address any barriers that may be contributing to staff leaving.

- Provide regular opportunities for anonymous feedback on culture, adjustments, and inclusion.

- Offer optional peer networks for disabled staff, supported with practical resources such as administrative help, accessible spaces, and modest funding for activities.

- Review recognition and communication practices to ensure they do not exclude or overlook disabled staff.

- Ensure disability-related absences do not trigger attendance warnings, disciplinaries, or performance processes, in line with Equality Act requirements.

**11. Ensure accountability and continuous improvement.**

- Monitor how long it takes to put agreed adjustments in place and address any delays openly, so staff and students know what to expect.

- Reflect accessibility and inclusive practice within performance reviews for managers and senior leaders responsible for leadership education, so expectations are consistent across the institution.

- Consider sharing an anonymised annual update on accessibility progress ("You said, we did") to show how feedback has led to improvements.

- Integrate disability inclusion into departmental, education and development planning so it is consistently considered in decision-making.

Support Received After Disclosing a Disability (DSUK 2024)
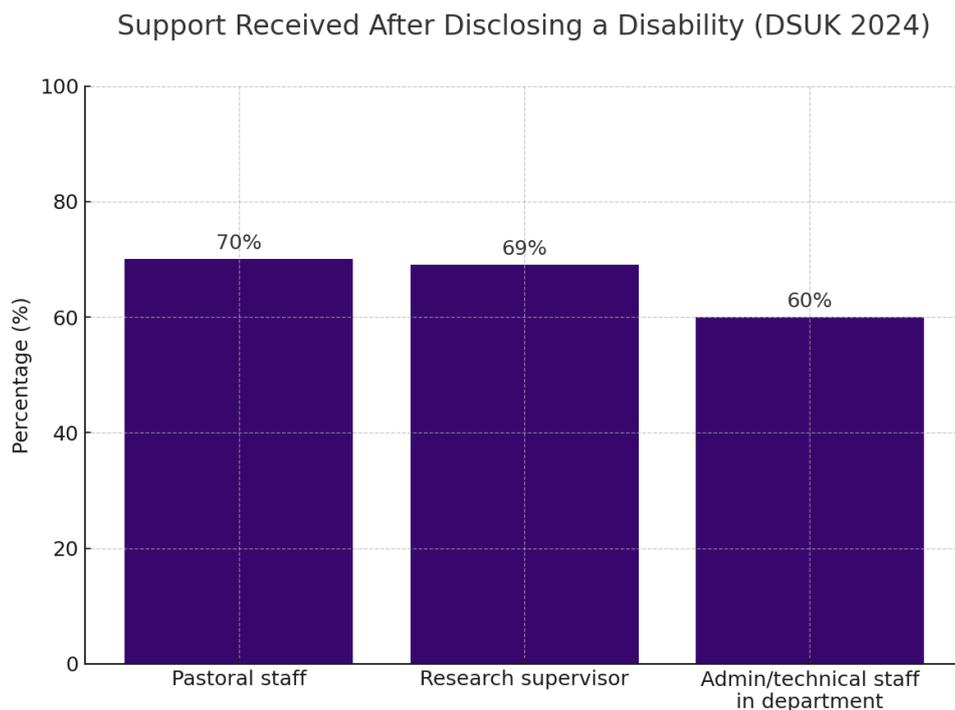
# F. Provide Ongoing Practical Support

Accessibility is not a one-off task but something that needs steady, ongoing attention. Transparent processes, reliable equipment, and timely support show that inclusion is part of everyday practice. When adjustments are simple to request, and systems operate smoothly, people can participate with confidence and focus on their learning or work.

## Actions

**1. Make adjustments simple and confidential to request.**

- Consider creating a clear, confidential online access request form hosted on a single, easy-to-find webpage.

- Include an email address for advice and follow-up support.

- Use clear, concise language and keep forms as simple and accessible as possible.

- Handle all information in line with data protection requirements.

- Share details only with the staff members who need them to provide adjustments.

- Avoid requesting unnecessary medical documentation, especially for long-term or well-established conditions.

- Provide clear timelines for responses so students and staff know what to expect.

**2. Provide support for funding, equipment, and technology.**

- Refer students to the appropriate institutional support services (e.g. Disability Services or equivalent) for support with Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) applications.

- Maintain a small pool of loan equipment (e.g. ergonomic chairs, adjustable desks, headsets) and ensure access to captioning software to help ensure that staff and short-course participants receive timely support when needed.

- Provide rapid replacements for faulty or broken equipment to avoid disruption.

- Ensure all assistive technology (e.g. speech-to-text software, screen readers) has appropriate licences and support.

### 3. Check and maintain the physical environment regularly.

- Test automatic doors, lifts, hearing loops, lighting, temperature controls, and signage each term.

- Maintain an accessible reporting process for students and staff to flag broken equipment or access issues.

- Communicate repairs and expected timelines clearly to reassure users that issues are being addressed.

- Make sure teaching or training spaces used for leadership activities remain clutter-free, well-lit, and easy to navigate.

### 4. Support wellbeing and sensory needs.

- Make available quiet rooms or low-stimulation spaces as standard within leadership teaching buildings or event venues.

- Offer flexible or online attendance options for those managing pain, fatigue, anxiety, fluctuating conditions or sensory overload.

- Share recordings or accessible summaries of missed sessions where appropriate to support access needs.

- Ensure sensory considerations (e.g. scent-free, adjustable lighting, volume levels) remain consistent across teaching environments.

### 5. Train staff in accessibility and adjustments.

- Provide staff involved in leadership programmes with practical training in accessible teaching practices, captioning tools, and inclusive communication.

- Ensure tutors and facilitators know how to respond to access requests promptly and appropriately.

- Create short, practical resources such as an "Accessibility at a Glance" guide or checklist.

- Encourage peer sharing of good practice and examples of successful adjustments.

### 6. Reduce administrative burden.

- Avoid lengthy or complex medical evidence requirements unless necessary.

- Accept existing evidence where appropriate (e.g. long-term diagnoses, historic DSA assessments, Access to Work reports).

- Allow students and staff to revisit or update their adjustments without repeating the whole process.

- Keep internal procedures consistent so individuals do not have to navigate multiple different routes for similar requests.

**7. Maintain digital accessibility.**

- Audit online platforms, VLEs (Virtual Learning Environments such as Moodle or Blackboard, where used), course pages and assessment tools regularly for accessibility.

- Ensure all new documents follow accessibility standards (headings, alt text, contrast).

- Test online activities with diverse users, including neurodivergent students or staff, to check that instructions are easy to follow, the layout is uncluttered, and tasks do not create unnecessary cognitive load.

- Provide alternatives for any digital activities that cannot be made accessible.

**8. Provide rapid "on-the-day" adjustments.**

- Establish a simple process for short-notice adjustments (e.g. unexpected flare-ups, illness, access failures).

- Provide spare equipment, alternative seating, quiet areas, and hybrid access options.

- Ensure teaching staff feel confident offering flexible participation methods without needing formal approval.

**9. Ensure continuity of support throughout leadership programmes.**

- Revisit adjustments at key stages (e.g. new modules or programme components, placements, group projects).

- Ensure leadership activities (presentations, workshops, networking, practical exercises) embed accessibility from the outset.

- Avoid requiring students to "start again" with adjustments when moving between modules or staff members.

## 10. Monitor and evaluate support systems.

- Track response times for adjustments and repair requests.

- Invite anonymous feedback on the accessibility and overall supportiveness of the programme.

- Use findings to inform future programme planning, strategic decisions, and budgeting.

### Student Experiences of Adjustments (DSUK 2024)
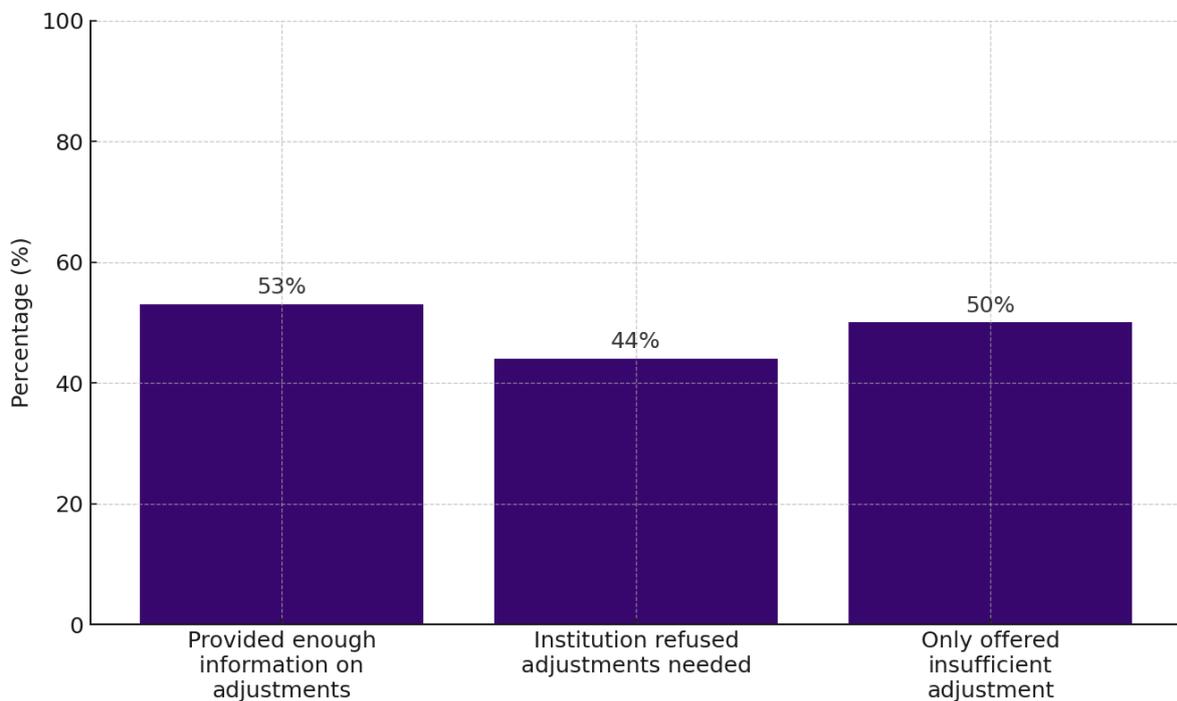
# G. Sponsorship and Visible Representation

Including disabled leaders in education and pathways is an important part of building an inclusive culture. Many disabled students report that they rarely encounter openly disabled academics, mentors, or leaders on their programmes, and this can contribute to a sense that "leadership is not for people like me." Increasing visible representation, whether through academic staff, guest lecturers, programme leads, advisory board members, honorary posts, senior sponsors, and alumni, helps signal that leadership roles are both possible and valued for disabled people.

While role models can positively influence confidence and aspiration, it is equally clear that having a range of relatable leaders benefits all students. Sponsorship, in which senior leaders actively support and advocate for the advancement of underrepresented colleagues, can be especially impactful for disabled individuals who may face additional structural barriers in leadership pathways.

Embedding genuine, diverse visibility across teaching, governance, and public-facing activities strengthens belonging. It also enhances the credibility of programmes and demonstrates that disability is recognised as a valued and integral part of the leadership landscape.

## Actions

**1. Showcase diverse disabled leaders.**

- Consider strengthening the visibility of openly disabled leaders within existing programme and institution webpages, such as staff profiles, programme pages, and external leadership partners.

- Ensure all content includes captions, transcripts, alt text, and BSL interpretation where appropriate.

- Share positive stories that highlight leadership strengths, achievements and impact, not solely disability-related challenges.

- Include people with visible and non-visible disabilities who have chosen to be open about their disability and ensure a range of backgrounds and experiences are represented.

**2. Ensure disabled representation in panels, boards, and public events.**

- Where possible, include at least one disabled speaker, facilitator or decision-maker at events, panel discussions, conferences, and other multi-speaker settings.

- Build accessibility into event budgets from the outset (captions, accessible stages, reserved seating, ramps, quiet rooms).

- When inviting disabled contributors, prioritise those who bring both subject knowledge and lived insight where relevant.


**3. Fund access to leadership opportunities.**

- Sponsor a set number of funded or subsidised places on leadership programmes and external conferences for disabled applicants or those with lower incomes.

- Provide free carer tickets where required.

- Offer interpreters, captioners, mobility support, and equipment as part of event planning.

- Ensure application processes use clear, accessible language and are available in a range of formats.


**4. Develop mentoring and sponsorship schemes.**

- Pair disabled students or newer members of staff with experienced leaders who can provide mentorship, strategic advice, and access to networks.

- Include guidance for mentors on inclusive mentoring practices, communication, and boundaries.

- Encourage sponsorship behaviours, advocating for disabled mentees in meetings, opening doors to opportunities and nominating them for leadership experiences.


**5. Review all imagery, language, and messaging.**

- Ensure disabled people are included in programme marketing materials, brochures, websites, and public-facing communications.

- Use real staff, students, alumni, board members, and partners wherever possible.

- Make sure representation appears across a wide range of contexts.

- Use empowering, current terminology aligned with the Social Model of Disability.

**6. Track visibility and representation.**

- Monitor how often disabled people appear as speakers, authors, facilitators or leaders in events and communications.

- Track representation on programme advisory boards and leadership-related governance groups.

- Share progress annually to highlight improvements and celebrate role models.

- Support steady, ongoing representation in teaching, events, and communications.

**7. Promote visible allyship and leadership accountability.**

- Encourage senior leaders to show active support for accessibility and representation.

- Make disabled representation a routine consideration in programme planning (for example, asking 'Who is represented here?').

- Support consistent representation across leadership programme governance, teaching, marketing, and public-facing activities, rather than concentrating visibility in only one area.

- Ensure students can see disabled leadership reflected in both decision-making roles and front-facing positions.

Impact of Visible Disabled Leadership (Workforce Data)
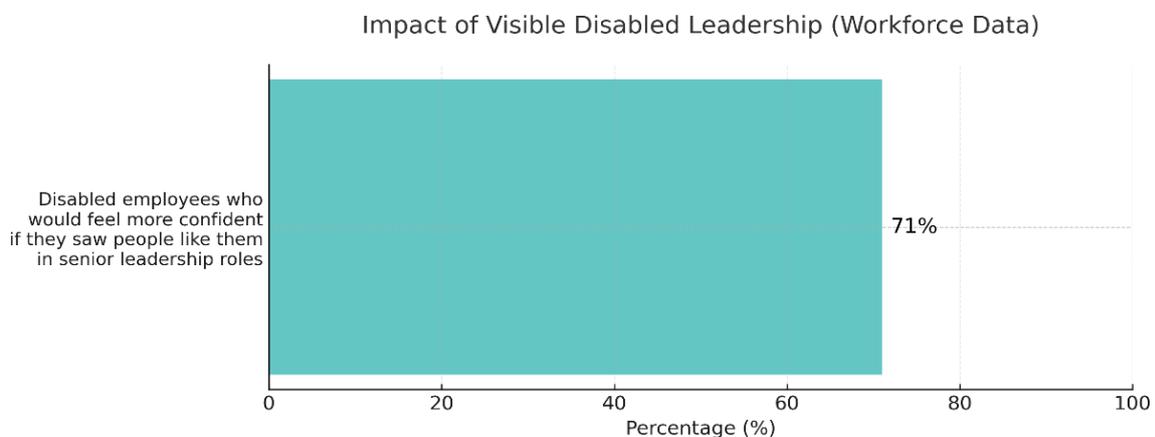
# H. Fund Disabled-Led Leadership and Research

Research consistently shows that disabled academics encounter structural barriers, limited visibility, and obstacles to progression in higher education. Much of the existing scholarship on disability in academia is still written about disabled people rather than by them, highlighting ongoing gaps in representation and authorship.

Disabled academics may face practical challenges, including difficulties attending conferences, accessing research funding, and meeting traditional research expectations, particularly when these expectations rely on travel, intensive schedules, or inaccessible processes. Visibility, representation and belonging play an essential role in shaping confidence, aspiration, and leadership development. Therefore, education providers play a vital role in promoting research cultures that support leadership, scholarship, and practice in which disabled scholars can contribute fully and where their perspectives are recognised, valued, and embedded.

## Actions

**1. Fund disabled-led research and innovation.**

- Consider establishing a small Accessibility and Inclusion Innovation Grant that disabled staff and students can use to design, test or improve accessibility solutions across the institution.

- When resources allow, provide mini-grants for disabled students or researchers who need support to attend conferences, purchase adaptive technology, or hire interpreters.

- Create ring-fenced funding streams for disabled researchers so they are not required to compete against unrelated priorities for accessibility-related resources.

**2. Make access costs part of every research budget.**

- When planning or applying for leadership-related research funding, it may help to include an allowance for accessibility-related needs (for example, captions, interpreters, travel adjustments, or accessible accommodation).

- Including these costs early can prevent delays and reduce the need for repeated individual requests.

- Simple budget examples or guidance notes can help research teams remember everyday accessibility items when preparing proposals.

- Where appropriate, providers can also highlight to external funders that accessibility-related costs are a routine and necessary part of enabling full participation in research.

**3. Ensure research participation is accessible.**

- Check that research venues have step-free access, automatic doors, hearing loops, and nearby accessible toilets with adequate turning space for larger powered wheelchairs.

- Offer remote or hybrid participation options for interviews, focus groups, workshops, seminars, and research roles where appropriate.

- Ensure online surveys, consent forms and information sheets are screen-reader compatible and written in clear, accessible language.

- Provide accessible options for participants with sensory, cognitive or communication differences (e.g. extended time, alternative formats, quiet settings, visual supports).

- Offer participants different ways to contribute (digital, spoken or written) where this is needed for accessibility.

**4. Mentor and sponsor disabled researchers, particularly within leadership-related research and scholarship.**

- Pair early-career disabled academics with senior mentors who can provide support around funding, publishing, conference planning, and progression.

- Encourage sponsorship behaviours where senior colleagues advocate for disabled researchers in meetings, nominate them for panels, and recommend them for leadership roles.

- Facilitate collaborative authorship with disabled experts and ensure their contributions are visible and recognised.

- Consider ways of acknowledging the time and contribution involved in mentoring, so that this work feels valued and supported.

**5. Ensure meaningful, accurate authorship.**

- Where disabled contributors have meaningfully shaped the design, analysis or writing of a project, consider including them as authors or co-authors rather than listing them only as "consultants" or "participants."

- Research leads should ensure that the authorship list accurately reflects who contributed intellectually to the work (for example, developing ideas, analysing findings, or shaping the conclusions).

- Where possible, use collaborative or co-produced approaches, where disabled people help shape the research questions, the methods and how the findings are shared.

## 6. Reduce administrative and structural barriers within research.

- Make processes as straightforward as possible when disabled researchers need to use alternative formats, remote methods, or different communication approaches.

- Where feasible, offer administrative help where routine processes, such as booking travel, arranging accessible venues, or managing paperwork, may present additional barriers.

- Provide flexibility where possible, such as adjusted deadlines, alternative ways of sharing progress, or hybrid options for research meetings.

## 7. Build a pipeline for future disabled researchers through education and leadership-linked research opportunities.

- Create opportunities for disabled undergraduate and postgraduate students to gain early research experience, such as internships, assistant roles or involvement in small, funded projects.

- Offer accessible workshops on topics such as research methods, writing for publication, leadership skills and applying for grants.

- Encourage supervisors to actively consider disabled students for research involvement, rather than assuming barriers will prevent participation.

- Where appropriate, involve disabled external professionals in research as co-investigators, partners, or advisory board members, particularly when their expertise strengthens the project.

- Provide paid or recognised opportunities in ways that do not affect disability-related benefits. Voucher-based recognition is often offered; any other payment method should be carefully reviewed to ensure eligibility is not affected.

**8. Improve visibility of disabled research leaders.**

- Profile disabled researchers and their work through institution platforms such as staff webpages, blogs, newsletters, or research spotlights.

- Involve disabled researchers in relevant decision-making groups, advisory boards, or project teams where their expertise adds value.

- Encourage conference organisers to feature disabled speakers, facilitators, and chairs where feasible.

- Highlight disabled-led publications and grants in institution communications, such as newsletters, research announcements, or staff updates.

**9. Strengthen ethical and participatory research practice.**

- Encourage disabled contributors to help shape research from the beginning, including deciding what questions are asked and how findings are shared.

- Guide staff on inclusive research practice, including clear communication, accessible participation, and appropriate consent processes.

- Support research teams to involve disabled people in more significant ways, moving beyond one-off feedback and towards ongoing participation where possible.

**10. Monitor and report progress.**

- Track how many leadership-related research projects are disability-led or include disabled co-authors.

- Monitor accessibility-related request rates and assess whether budgets meet researcher needs.

- Publish annual updates outlining progress, challenges, and next steps ("You said, we funded").

- Use data to identify gaps in representation and areas where support needs strengthening.

# I. Build Staff Capacity

Inclusive practice thrives when every member of staff understands how to make learning accessible, flexible, and welcoming. With the right tools, training and encouragement, accessibility becomes part of everyday teaching rather than an additional task. Building staff confidence not only removes barriers for disabled students but also shows all learners that inclusion is a core value within the programme.

Strengthening staff capacity reinforces that accessibility is everyone's responsibility, not just Disability Services, and that inclusive leadership is demonstrated through consistent, everyday practice.

## Actions

**1. Provide short, practical training.**

- Offer quick, accessible training sessions for all staff covering high-impact actions such as captions, clear fonts, good colour contrast, structured documents, flexible assessments, and hybrid teaching options.

- Keep training practical and focused on simple steps that staff can apply immediately.

- Make this training mandatory for anyone designing, delivering, or assessing a course.

- Provide annual refreshers to help staff stay up to date with evolving accessibility standards and technologies.

- Where helpful, sessions can be delivered or supported by external specialists such as IT accessibility professionals or digital learning experts.

**2. Create a ready-to-use accessibility toolkit.**

- If possible, provide templates for accessible PowerPoints, handouts, module guides, learning outcomes and leadership pathway descriptions.

- Include quick venue checklists (step-free access, hearing loops, room layout, signage, nearby accessible toilets, quiet spaces).

- Offer digital accessibility guides for Word, PDF, Teams, Zoom, Moodle, and other commonly used platforms.

- Ensure the toolkit is easy to find, updated regularly, and linked across staff intranet pages, induction materials, and course planning resources.

## 3. Make digital teaching accessible by default.

- Train staff to create accessible documents using clear headings, alt text, readable colours and properly tagged files so screen-reader users can navigate them.

- Before using new digital tools or online activities, test them with disabled students or staff to ensure they work well for a wide range of users.

- Where possible, have a central point of contact or a small team within the institution who can check digital tools for basic accessibility before they are adopted more widely.

- Encourage staff to provide captions on all videos and audio materials, and to offer transcripts wherever possible.

## 4. Embed accessibility in staff reviews and accountability structures.

- Include accessibility within annual reviews, module reflections, and routine course monitoring.

- Ask staff directly: "How have you improved inclusion this year?"

- Reward teams who demonstrate consistent, high-quality accessible practice through recognition, awards, workload credit, or teaching excellence nominations.

- Encourage leadership teams to model inclusive behaviour. Accessibility is strengthened when senior staff demonstrate it in their own teaching and events.

## 5. Emphasise that inclusive design starts early.

- Remind staff that accessibility is most effective when built in at the design stage rather than retrofitted.

- Encourage teams to build accessibility from the start when planning content, activities, and course schedules.

- Make accessibility one of the standard checks when courses are approved or reviewed.

- If possible, ensure staff consult with disabled students or colleagues during the planning stage, not after barriers arise.

## 6. Strengthen new-staff induction and onboarding.

- Ensure every new lecturer, tutor, associate, or facilitator receives induction on inclusive teaching, accessibility responsibilities, and available support.

- Include a brief onboarding guide explaining essential tools, contacts, expectations, and standard accessibility practices.

- Consider further training for those who wish to be Inclusion Leads.

## 7. Develop Inclusion Leads.

- Identify at least one staff member in each department who can provide local support, answer questions, and signpost colleagues to resources.

- Inclusion Leads can attend briefings, assess new tools, gather feedback from disabled students, and help ensure consistent practice across teams.

- Recognise and support Inclusion Leads' contributions through workload allocation or formal acknowledgement.
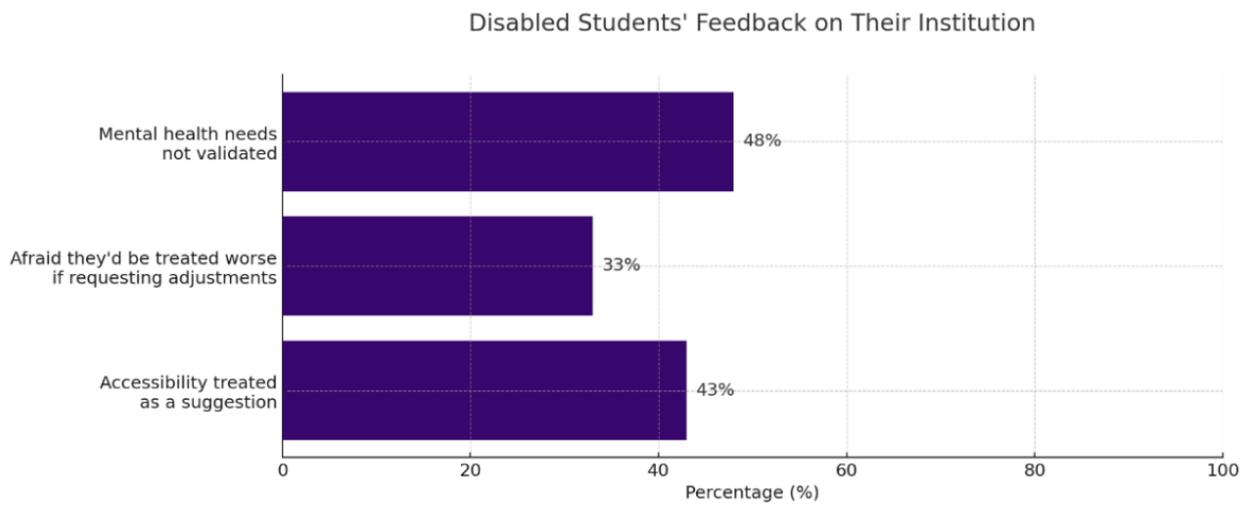
## 8. Encourage peer learning and community practice.

- Consider creating short "showcase sessions" where staff share quick wins or examples of accessible teaching that worked well.

- Provide opportunities for departments to share tools, templates, and creative approaches.

- Encourage staff to collaborate with disabled students to co-evaluate the accessibility of current teaching.

## 9. Monitor progress and support continuous improvement.

- Gather feedback from disabled students about where teaching and digital access are working well and where barriers still appear.

- Consider sharing anonymised feedback with staff and showing how it has helped shape improvements.

- Include a small number of accessibility questions in module evaluations or course reviews so feedback is collected routinely.

- Review progress annually and be open about areas where further improvement is still needed.

## Disabled Students' Feedback on Their Institution



Mental health needs not validated: 48%

Afraid they'd be treated worse if requesting adjustments: 33%

Accessibility treated as a suggestion: 43%

Percentage (%)

# J. Track and Publish Progress

Real inclusion requires transparency, measurement, and accountability. By tracking progress and openly sharing results, programme providers demonstrate that accessibility is an active, ongoing commitment rather than a one-off initiative. Transparent reporting supports institutional learning, builds trust with disabled students and staff, and ensures that improvements are visible, meaningful, and sustained over time. Tracking progress signals that inclusion is a strategic priority, not an optional addition.

## Actions

**1. Collect the correct data.**

- Track participation, progression and completion across disability, gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic background.

- Monitor engagement with leadership programmes specifically (applications, acceptances, withdrawals, achievement).

- Include anonymous questions on belonging, accessibility, and confidence within course feedback forms.

- Track waiting times for adjustments, response times, and satisfaction with support received.

- Collect data on both visible and non-visible disabilities, using categories that are inclusive and reflect the diversity of disabled students.

**2. Include feedback from disabled students and staff.**

- Gather short anonymous comments such as "What worked well?" and "What could be improved?"

- Seek feedback on physical access, digital access, communication, and overall experience.

- Present the findings clearly, for example, with short summaries, clear headings, and simple visuals.

- Where possible, share how feedback has led to improvements, to help build trust and show responsiveness.

**3. Audit physical access regularly.**

- Audit relevant routes from car parks, bus stops, and key buildings to teaching spaces twice a year.

- Confirm that lifts, automatic doors, lighting, signage, and accessible toilets remain functional and well-maintained.

- Monitor the time taken to repair accessibility-related issues and aim for rapid turnaround.

- Publish updates when repairs are made so students and staff can see visible progress.

**4. Publish an annual accessibility summary.**

- Consider creating a one-page public summary highlighting achievements, challenges, feedback, and next steps.

- Present information in a clear way using short headings, simple charts, and alt text for any images.

- Celebrate staff and teams who have contributed to improvements.

- Present data transparently. What improved, what did not, and plans for the following year.

**5. Integrate inclusion into leadership metrics and governance.**

- Ask programme leads to demonstrate how they have improved inclusion each year.

- Include accessibility as a regular discussion point in annual reviews, course approvals, and departmental planning meetings.

- Build simple checks into routine monitoring, such as whether teaching materials are accessible and whether students feel their needs are being met.

- Ensure relevant senior leaders or programme sponsors receive regular updates.

- Make sure accessibility work connects with wider organisational priorities and meets its legal responsibilities.

**6. Provide clear routes for raising concerns (with accountability).**

- Offer a safe, confidential reporting mechanism for access barriers, poor practice, or discrimination.

- Acknowledge concerns promptly and provide clear timescales for resolution.

- Ensure individuals never face disadvantage for raising an issue.

- Record anonymised summaries of recurring issues and the actions taken to address them.

- Track themes (e.g. digital access, physical barriers, delays) to help identify what needs improving.

**7. Benchmark and compare over time.**

- Set annual accessibility goals and measure progress against them. For instance, you might track:
    1. The percentage of events that include live captioning
    2. The percentage of leadership spaces confirmed as step-free.

- Compare performance year-on-year to highlight achievements and persistent barriers.

- Where possible, benchmark externally against sector reports (e.g. Disabled Students UK, Advance HE).

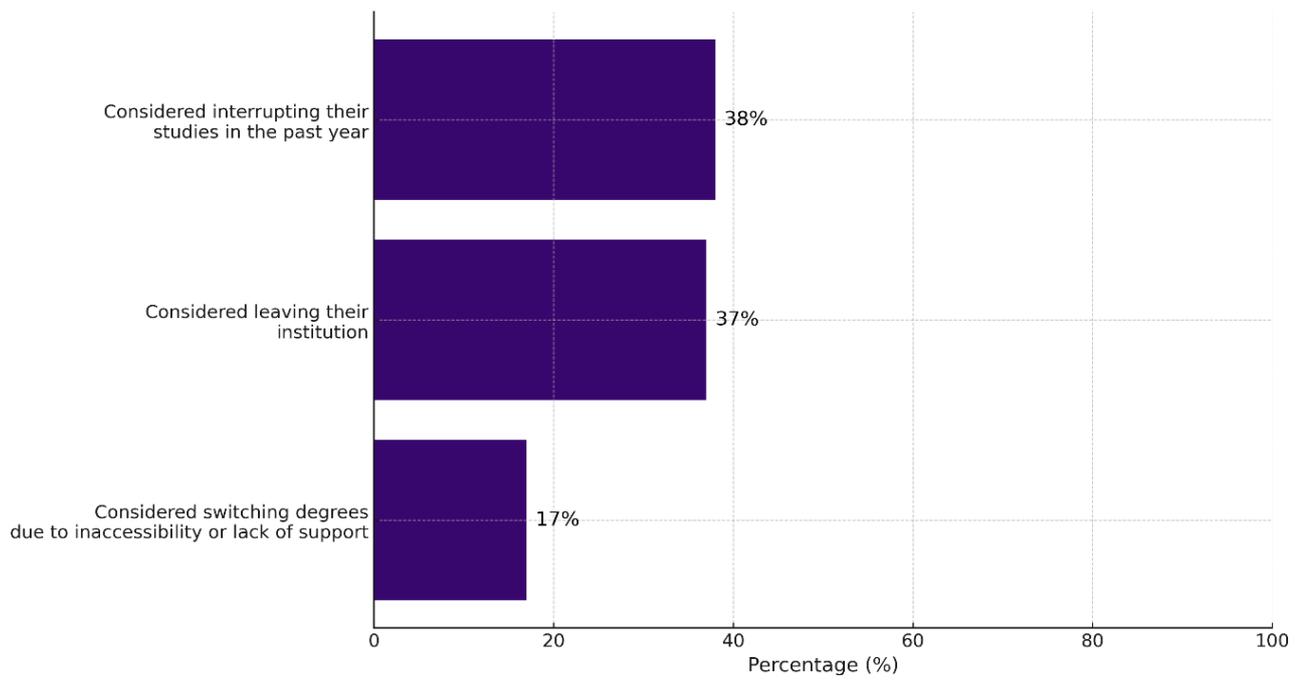**8. Use dashboards and visual reporting tools (to support engagement).**

- Consider creating internal dashboards showing metrics such as attendance, adjustments, access barriers, and progression.

- Ensure dashboards are accessible and use clear visual contrast.

- Share summaries with teams to support local improvement and accountability.

**9. Involve disabled people in interpreting the data.**

- Invite disabled staff or student groups to share their views on the findings.

- Consider asking for feedback to help check that the interpretation feels accurate and free of assumptions.

- Explain what was learned together and how this will influence future improvements.

Impact of Inaccessible Systems on Disabled Students (DSUK 2024)

| | |
|---|---|
| Considered interrupting their studies in the past year | 38% |
| Considered leaving their institution | 37% |
| Considered switching degrees due to inaccessibility or lack of support | 17% |

Percentage (%)

# K. Celebrate Diverse Leadership Models

People aspire to what they can see. When disabled leaders are visible in teaching, research, and public roles, they expand our shared understanding of what leadership looks like. Their work demonstrates that leadership is grounded in values, empathy, collaboration, and impact, not stamina or constant visibility.

Celebrating diverse leadership models also helps challenge traditional expectations, such as extroversion, rapid processing, or constant availability, which often exclude disabled people. By ensuring fair access to opportunities and authentically representing disabled leaders, programmes can nurture a culture where everyone feels seen, supported and able to recognise their own potential. This strengthens the pipeline of future leaders because each time a disabled leader is visible, it signals to the next generation that leadership includes them as well.

## Actions

**1. Showcase different ways of leading.**

- Highlight disabled and marginalised leaders through blogs, interviews, and case studies.

- Ensure every video includes accurate captions, transcripts, and image descriptions. Where appropriate, use BSL interpretation for major public events.

- Feature leaders with visible and non-visible impairments, ensuring representation includes people with a range of backgrounds and identities.

**2. Use real examples in teaching.**

- Include case studies and guest speakers that reflect diverse leadership journeys and lived experiences.

- Use materials written or co-authored by disabled leaders wherever possible, not just materials about disability.

- Incorporate education that critiques traditional expectations and highlights inclusive, empathetic, and empowering leadership practices.

**3. Make events visibly inclusive.**

- Ensure event panels, seminars and lectures routinely include disabled speakers and other underrepresented voices for their expertise and insights.

- Provide hybrid attendance options for all events, with clear joining instructions and access information.

- Include details of step-free routes, accessible toilets, hearing loops, parking, and public transport options in every event listing.

**4. Acknowledge and reward inclusive leadership.**

- Highlight staff who help make teaching and leadership more accessible by sharing their work in internal newsletters or updates.

- Consider an annual Award that celebrates colleagues or teams modelling empathetic, inclusive, collaborative, and empowering leadership.

- Celebrate students and alumni whose leadership reflects inclusive values and positive impact.

- Share these stories visibly across programme, organisational or public-facing websites and social media channels.

**5. Check how inclusion looks in practice.**

- When planning materials or events, consider:
  - "Who is visible here?"
  - "Who might be missing?"
  - "Can disabled people see themselves represented?"

- Ensure marketing materials, websites and brochures include positive, accurate and up-to-date disability representation.

- Aim for representation that appears consistently across decision-making panels, teaching, communications, and public-facing events.
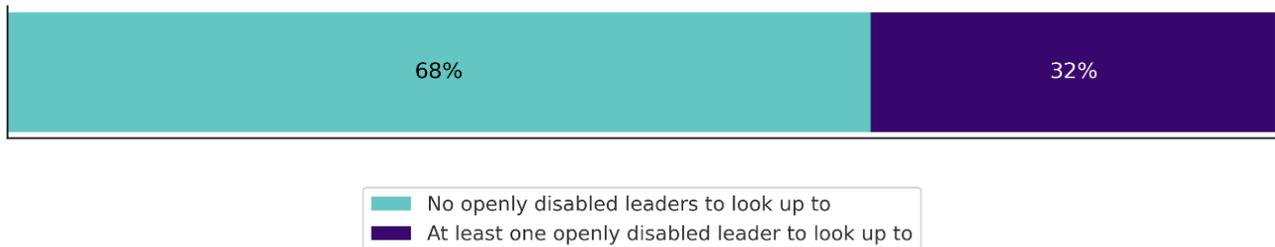
**6. Track representation over time.**

- Monitor how often disabled people appear as speakers, authors, guest lecturers, or leaders in internal and external events.

- Track disabled representation in the groups where decisions are made, such as panels, boards or planning groups.

- Share annual summaries celebrating progress and identifying areas to strengthen.

**7. Build a pipeline of diverse leadership talent.**

- Provide disabled students and staff with opportunities to contribute to activities, such as chairing events, co-leading modules or programme components or joining planning groups.

- Invite disabled colleagues to join steering groups, advisory panels, and public-facing events.

- Create clear, accessible pathways for disabled people to progress into leadership and influence within programmes or organisations.

Disabled Students' Access to Visible Role Models (DSUK 2024)

| 68% | 32% |
|---|---|

- No openly disabled leaders to look up to
- At least one openly disabled leader to look up to

# L. Sustain Inclusion as Continuous Practice

Inclusion is like watering a plant. If attention is only occasional, it struggles. However, with steady, regular care, it grows strong and thrives. Accessibility needs this same consistent commitment over time. With thoughtful, ongoing effort, inclusion becomes part of daily practice across the institution, rather than a short-term project or a milestone that fades.

Keeping inclusion going ensures progress is not dependent on individual staff members but is supported across teams, systems, and structures. This helps the institution move forward with clarity, accountability, and genuine care for its community.

## Actions

**1. Keep reviewing.**

- Review courses, policies, and materials annually, ideally with input from a disabled expert or advisory group.

- Schedule internal checks for essential access features, transport routes, signage, doors, toilets, hearing loops, and quiet rooms.

- At the start of each term, check all teaching or training spaces for accessibility, including wheelchair access, furniture layout, lighting, and equipment.

- Conduct periodic digital accessibility audits to ensure platforms, assessments, and resources remain compliant and user-friendly.

**2. Budget every year for inclusion.**

- Set aside an annual accessibility fund to cover captioning, interpreters, adaptive technology, sensory adjustments, and emergency repairs.

- Avoid relying on one-off grants or ad hoc requests. Treat accessibility as a core, predictable part of institutional spending.

- Build accessibility costs into programme budgets, placements, events, and research activities from the outset.

**3. Check suppliers and contractors.**

- Ask external trainers, venues, and IT providers to confirm their accessibility arrangements before contracts are agreed.

- Prioritise partners who meet minimum accessibility standards (step-free access, captions, alt text, accessible toilets).

- Make sure new systems, platforms or tools meet accessibility standards before they are purchased.

**4. Keep inclusion in leadership conversations.**

- Keep accessibility on the agenda in planning and programme review meetings.

- Make inclusion part of how leadership performance, accountability and success are measured.

- Encourage senior leaders to role-model inclusive practices through their own events, communications, and decisions.

**5. Make it visible.**

- Share accessibility updates publicly to demonstrate progress ("We have added automatic doors," "We have improved signage," "We have increased captioned recordings").

- Use plain, positive language, so updates feel encouraging and transparent.

- Visibility builds trust and reinforces the institution's sustained commitment to inclusion.

**6. Plan for continuity.**

- When staff move on, ensure that inclusion practices, contacts and responsibilities are formally handed over.

- Maintain a shared folder of accessibility templates, guides and contact lists so knowledge is not lost over time.

- Include accessibility expectations in programme handbooks, job descriptions, and staff inductions.

- Ensure visiting lecturers and external facilitators meet minimum accessibility standards (accessible slides, captions, step-free access).

- Keep accessibility practices consistent even when staff change, or teams are reorganised.

# M. Disability Etiquette and Everyday Respect

Respectful communication and thoughtful interaction make a real difference in how welcome people feel. By approaching everyone with patience, dignity and openness, leaders set the tone for an environment where disabled people feel genuinely valued, understood, and included.

Inclusive etiquette is everyday respect, practised consistently. Small behaviours make a significant impact, and when leaders model them, they help create a culture where everyone feels safe to participate and be themselves.

## Actions

**1. Treat disabled people as you would anyone else.**

- Address the person directly, not their interpreter, carer, or companion.

- Speak clearly and at a natural pace. There is no need to raise your voice unless requested.

- Avoid speaking in a patronising or overly simplified manner, respect maturity, expertise, and autonomy.

**2. Use respectful, person-centred communication.**

- Do not talk down to people or finish sentences for them.

- Avoid making assumptions about needs, abilities, or preferences. Everyone is different.

- If unsure, ask politely, "Is there anything I can do to make this easier for you?"

- Give people time to communicate without rushing or interrupting.

- Respect communication access needs (e.g. facing the person, avoiding covering your mouth, allowing processing time).

**3. Respect personal space, equipment, and mobility aids.**

- Never lean on a person's wheelchair, walking aid or mobility scooter.

- Do not touch or move equipment or personal items without permission.

- Never push a wheelchair unless explicitly asked.

- Guide or assistance animals are working animals. Do not distract, pet, or feed them. If helpful, you may offer to get a bowl of water for the animal.

## 4. Use respectful and accurate language.

- In the UK, "disabled people" is preferred because it reflects the Social Model of Disability.

- Internationally, "people with disabilities" may be used. Honour personal preference where given.

- Avoid outdated or negative terms ("handicapped," "wheelchair-bound," "suffers from").

- Do not use euphemisms such as "differently abled." Plain, respectful language is best.

## 5. Respect privacy and boundaries.

- Do not ask people about their disability or medical history unless they choose to share.

- Avoid intrusive questions ("What is wrong with you?" "How do you manage?").

- Never pressure someone to explain their needs or justify adjustments.

## 6. Be mindful of environmental barriers.

- Check lighting, noise levels, temperature, and layout regularly. Small changes make a big difference.

- Offer support, do not assume, e.g. "Would you prefer a front-row seat?" "Is the lighting okay for you?"

- Ensure online environments are accessible (captions, chat summaries, transcripts).

- Give people options for participation (camera off, typing instead of speaking, breaks, or hybrid access).

## 7. Focus on the person, not the impairment.

- Disability is one part of identity. It does not define the whole person.

- Recognise expertise, leadership, and contributions first and foremost.

- Avoid reducing someone to their support needs or diagnosis.

## 8. Lead by example.

- Leaders set the tone. Model patience, flexibility, and respect in every interaction.

- When mistakes happen, acknowledge them with humility, make the necessary adjustments, and move forward. Learning together strengthens the culture.

- Embed respectful practices into meetings, teaching sessions and everyday conversations.

## 9. Emotional safety and power dynamics.

- Never expect disabled students or staff to educate others about disability unless they explicitly choose to.

- Avoid singling students out, spotlighting them or using them as examples in teaching.

- Respond quickly if someone reports feeling dismissed, singled out or uncomfortable.

- Ensure participation in disability-related discussions is always voluntary.

**Experiences After Raising Accessibility Issues (DSUK 2024)**
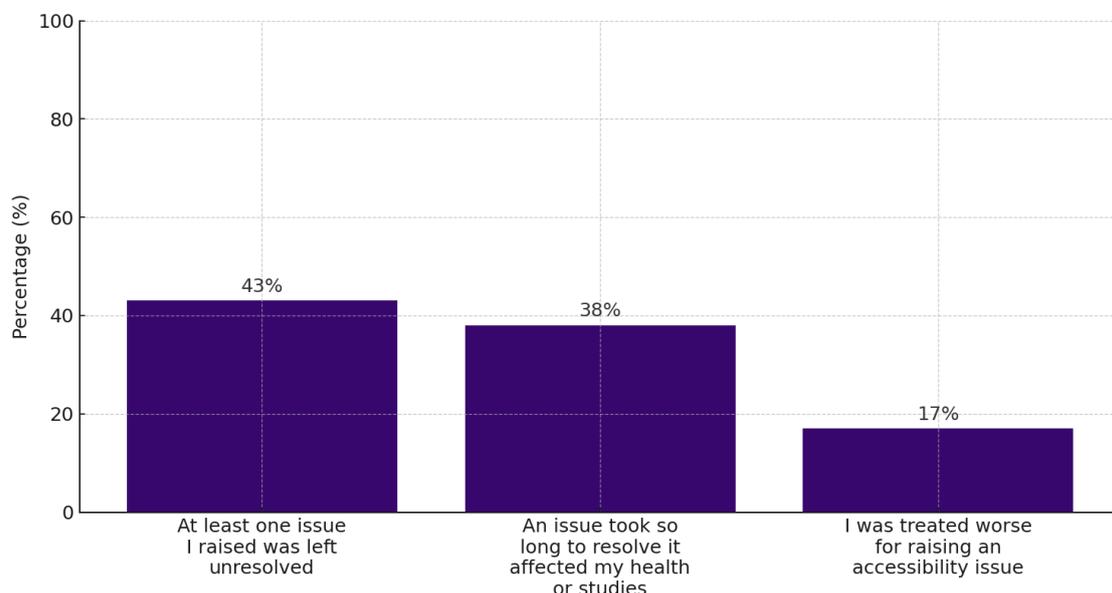
# N. Digital Accessibility Standards

Digital accessibility is crucial to ensuring everyone can access information, learning, and communication equally. Meeting recognised standards is not just about legal compliance; it is about good design, dignity, and respect for all users. When digital platforms and materials are easy to navigate, understand and interact with, they remove unnecessary barriers and create more equitable participation for everyone.

Accessible design benefits the entire institutional community, and when staff design with everyone in mind, they help build a culture where inclusion is natural, confident and embedded.

This section aligns with the UK Government Digital Service (GDS) accessibility principles (2019) and the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, WCAG 2.2 AA (W3C, 2023).

## Actions

**1. Follow national and international accessibility standards.**

- All websites, learning platforms and digital resources should meet, or be working towards, WCAG 2.2 AA, which is the current benchmark used in UK public sector guidance.

- Public sector bodies, including universities, must comply with the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No.2) Accessibility Regulations 2018, alongside the Equality Act 2010.

- Organisational materials should also follow Government Digital Service (GDS) accessibility principles, emphasising clarity, simplicity, and user-centred design.

- Ensure new software, apps, and purchasing requests meet accessibility criteria before approval.

- Many aspects of digital accessibility require technical expertise, including testing and compliance assessment. Where possible, involve digital accessibility specialists and IT staff to ensure accessibility fixes are accurate, sustainable, and aligned with legal and technical standards.

**2. Check compliance regularly.**

- Run accessibility checks using WAVE, Microsoft Accessibility Checker, or other built-in tools on Mac and Windows.

- Check compatibility with multiple assistive technologies, e.g. screen readers, screen magnifiers, voice recognition tools, and keyboard-only navigation.

- Ensure every website or portal has a clear, up-to-date Accessibility Statement explaining levels of compliance and who to contact about barriers.

- Review content annually (or whenever significant changes are made) to keep documentation accurate and responsive.

**3. Design for everyone from the start.**

- Use headings, alt text, descriptive link text, high-contrast colours, and clear language.

- Avoid PDFs where possible. Use accessible Word, HTML or structured formats that work with assistive technologies.

- Use accessible tables, avoid images of text, and ensure forms are correctly labelled.

- Always test content with real users, especially those using screen readers or keyboard-only navigation.

- Ensure all videos have accurate captions and provide transcripts for both video and audio materials.

- Provide downloadable resources in multiple formats (e.g. Word, HTML, or accessible PDF).

**4. Ensure digital teaching tools are accessible.**

- Use accessible layouts in PowerPoint, Teams, Zoom, Moodle or equivalent platforms.

- Enable captions in all live teaching sessions as standard.

- Provide recordings, transcripts, or written alternatives wherever appropriate.

- Ensure breakout rooms, polls, quizzes, and collaboration tools work with assistive technology.

- Keep instructions clear and avoid unnecessary cognitive load by using simple layouts and predictable navigation.

**5. Make mobile access a priority.**

- Check content on phones and tablets, as many disabled students rely on mobile devices for assistive technology.

- Ensure navigation is simple, buttons are large enough, and text reflows correctly.

- Provide alternative formats that download easily on low-bandwidth or older devices.

**6. Provide clear routes for reporting digital barriers.**

- Every digital platform should offer a simple way for users to report access issues.

- Acknowledge feedback promptly and give a precise timescale for resolution.

- Consider sharing updates publicly ("We have updated this resource to improve accessibility") to build confidence and trust.

**7. Build accessibility into procurement and contracts.**

- Ask suppliers to provide evidence of digital accessibility compliance before procurement (e.g. an accessibility statement or compliance report).

- Avoid purchasing tools that cannot meet baseline standards.

- Where appropriate, involve disabled users in testing and decision-making for new systems.

Sense of Belonging:
Disabled Students vs General Student Population
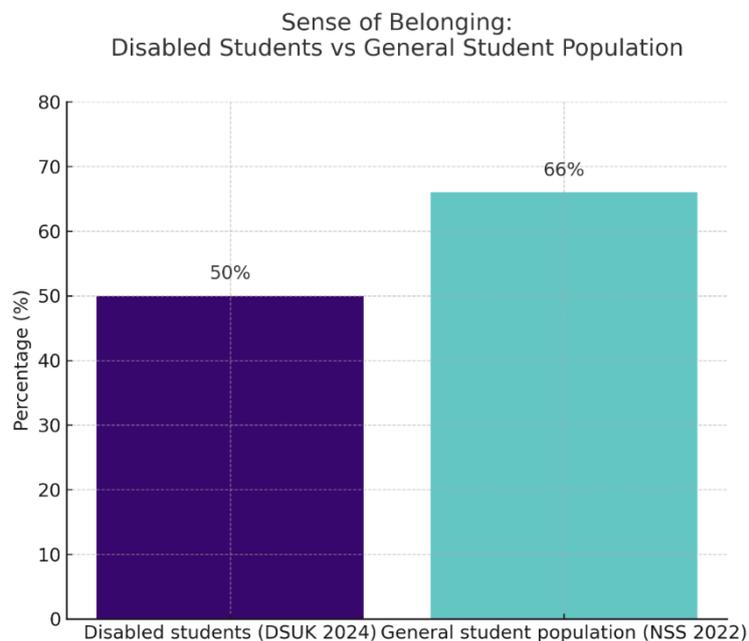
# O. Implementation Roadmap

Creating inclusive leadership education is a long-term journey, but meaningful progress can begin immediately. This roadmap provides a clear, achievable structure for embedding accessibility across programmes, policies, and everyday practice. The aim is to build confidence, create early momentum, and ensure long-term cultural change.

The roadmap is flexible. Different departments may progress at various speeds, but the direction remains the same: steady, sustained improvement, supported by lived experience and thoughtful leadership.

## Immediate Actions (0–6 Months)

**Laying the foundations and building confidence**

These quick wins create visible momentum and show everyone within the institution that inclusion is a genuine priority.

- Make all new digital materials accessible by default (clear fonts, headings, alt text, captions).

- Provide quick, practical training sessions for staff on accessible teaching and communication.

- Publish an Accessibility Statement for leadership programmes.

- Review the language used in course materials, websites, and communications.

- Ensure captions are available on all recorded content and enabled in all live sessions.

- Create or update simple accessibility templates (PowerPoints, module guides, event checklists).

- Establish a clear route for reporting access barriers and responding promptly.

- Audit the most-used teaching spaces for immediate physical access issues.

- Begin involving disabled students, staff, and external experts in early co-design conversations.

## Medium-Term Actions (6–12 Months)

**Embedding structural change and improving consistency**

The medium-term focus is on strengthening processes so that accessibility is not optional but a standard part of programme design.

- Update application forms, recruitment processes and learning materials to ensure they meet accessibility standards.

- Redesign internal forms, portals, and documents so they are screen-reader compatible and cognitively accessible.

- Embed accessibility checks into course approval and review processes.

- Introduce accessibility KPIs for programmes (e.g. captioning rates, template usage, satisfaction measures).

- Consider establishing Inclusion Leads within each programme or department.

- Begin building a bank of accessible teaching materials, case studies, and inclusive leadership examples.

- Include accessibility checks when selecting new software, teaching tools or event services.

- Provide specialist training for staff involved in admissions, placements, or programme delivery.

- Develop or update disability etiquette and inclusive communication guidance for staff.

- Start collecting baseline data on participation, barriers, and representation.

## Long-Term Actions (12–24 Months)

**Deep cultural change and sustained leadership development**

These actions strengthen culture, leadership practice, and systems, helping inclusion become part of the institution's identity.

- Embed lived experience across leadership education through co-authorship, co-teaching, and advisory roles.

- Establish funding streams for disabled-led research, innovation, and leadership pathways.

- Review leadership development programmes to ensure disabled staff are fully represented and supported.

- Monitor long-term trends in participation, progression, and barriers, and publish findings annually.

- Implement institution-wide expectations for inclusive leadership behaviours within relevant staff appraisals and training.

- Ensure continuity of accessibility practice across staff turnover, programme changes, and long-term planning.

- Highlight disabled leaders and alumni to strengthen representation and belonging.

- Work towards full compliance with WCAG 2.2 AA across websites, portals, and digital learning tools.

- Continue expanding hybrid, flexible and accessible formats for teaching, events, and activities.

- Conduct an external review every 2–3 years to benchmark progress and identify emerging priorities.

## Minimum Accessibility Standards Checklist

- All materials are available in accessible digital formats

- Captions enabled in all live sessions

- Hearing loops tested before use

- Step-free access confirmed for all teaching and event venues

- Large-print and plain-text options available

- Named Access Lead contact provided

## Monitoring and Evaluation Mini-Framework

- Annual accessibility audit

- Termly room checks

- KPIs (e.g. % of accessible modules or training programmes)

- Feedback loop with disabled students

- Transparent public reporting

## Overall Aim

The goal is steady, visible progress, not perfection overnight. By taking practical steps now, gradually strengthening processes, and investing in long-term cultural change, organisations can build an environment where accessibility and inclusion are woven into every part of their identity.

### Campus Accessibility Issues Reported by Students (DSUK 2024)
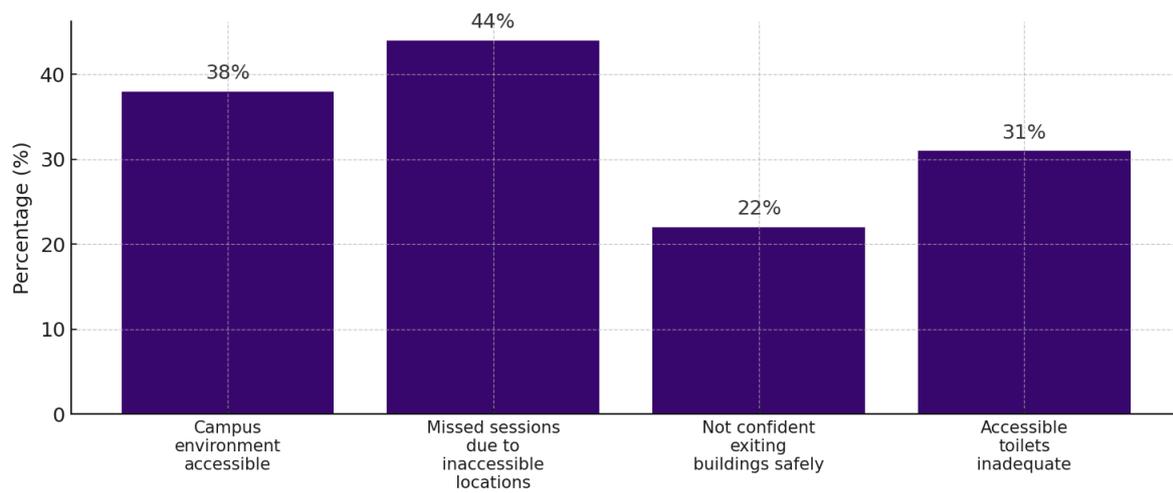
# Advisory Expertise

Sustaining inclusion requires ongoing expertise, reflection and lived experience. Many universities benefit from drawing on independent advisory expertise, whether internal or external, to help ensure accessibility remains active, informed, and meaningful across all areas of leadership education.

Engagement is typically periodic, often involving a small number of focused sessions each year, complemented by brief ad hoc advice where needed.

This expertise can support providers to:

- Review communications, policies and public statements for accuracy and alignment with the Social Model of Disability.

- Support teaching teams to embed inclusive, affirming, and accurate portrayals of disability within course content.

- Contribute to research activity or, where invited, co-author work relating to accessible and inclusive leadership.

- Offer periodic specialist advice in an independent capacity to strengthen inclusive decision-making across programmes and governance.

- Review events and conferences to ensure accessibility measures are embedded, communicated and model inclusive practice.

Additionally, each department can benefit from designating an internal Inclusion Lead to serve as a local point of contact for embedding inclusive practices and supporting consistent implementation across faculties and programmes.

## Why This Matters

Embedding lived expertise ensures inclusion remains grounded, practical, and authentic. Dedicated specialist advisory support can help identify barriers early, set realistic priorities, and ensure disability is communicated accurately and with care. Their presence can also strengthen trust, accountability, and confidence across the institution, ensuring that accessibility is not simply a standard to meet but a value that shapes everything the institution does.

# Summary: What Success Looks Like

When accessibility is built into leadership programmes:

- Disabled people can apply, study, teach and lead without unnecessary barriers.

- Courses, events, and publications use inclusive, empowering language reviewed by people with lived experience.

- Leadership programmes continue to reflect diverse voices, experiences, and styles, not a single idealised model.

- Disabled people play an active role in research and teaching on disability, rather than being studied solely by others.

- Every staff member understands their role in making materials, events, and environments accessible.

- Accessibility is embedded across buildings, digital systems, and day-to-day processes.

- Organisations continue to build on their strong reputation for leadership programmes grounded in equality, respect, and inclusion, with these values reflected both in policy and everyday practice.

Success is achieved when people no longer have to question whether they can participate. Access is built in, support is predictable, and everyone can focus on contributing their strengths rather than navigating barriers.

# The Vision

Many leadership education providers already demonstrate a deep commitment to inclusion, and this framework builds on that groundwork. By embedding accessibility throughout programmes, providers can strengthen inclusive practice, widen participation, and help shape cultures that value equity, flexibility and lived experience.

The vision of this framework is an education system in which disabled and non-disabled people can participate, develop, and lead with equal confidence and opportunity, and where inclusion is visible in the design of leadership programmes, reflected in everyday practice, and consistently experienced by those who take part.

The aim is not for disabled people to "fit" into existing leadership models, but for education itself to become inclusive, flexible and equitable, shaped by the people who engage with it and informed by lived experience.

# Conclusion

Inclusive leadership is not a one-off initiative but an ongoing commitment to equity, dignity and belonging. This framework offers a practical pathway for strengthening accessibility across the institution, from recruitment and teaching to research and digital learning. It invites all staff and students to view inclusion as a defining standard of excellent practice.

When accessibility is embedded from the outset, disabled students and staff can participate with confidence, contribute their strengths, and develop as leaders without unnecessary barriers. This not only enhances the individual experience but also strengthens the institution's leadership culture.

Many education providers already demonstrate a strong commitment to inclusive, values-driven practice. By continuing to embed accessibility, partnering with disabled experts, and sustaining this work over time, providers are well placed to shape sector expectations for what inclusive leadership education can be.

With sustained attention and collective responsibility, accessibility will remain an integral part of organisational identity, reflected in practice, experienced by students and staff, and recognised across the sector.

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A Word version of this framework is available on request.

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